

## **“Preach Christ, NOT The Church!”**

by Casey Head

Liberally minded brethren and those of the “grace-unity” persuasion will often object to our preaching against denominationalism and religious error by demanding, “Preach Christ, NOT the church.” They would prefer that we simply preach the love of God, the sacrifice of Christ and faith in Jesus *rather than* the kingdom of God and the New Testament pattern. But it is my contention that we **MUST**, as a result of denominationalism and rampant religious division, preach the New Testament pattern. Sadly, those who would oppose my efforts here would probably also have opposed the evangelists of the first century.

In Acts 7, Stephen is given an opportunity to defend himself before the Jewish counsel. While he devotes a majority of his sermon to the history of Israel, leading up to the coming of the Messiah, he addressed their false views and spoke very “harshly” to them. In verse 51, the man said, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and the murderers.” Those today who say, “Preach Christ, NOT the church,” would also have opposed Stephen who preached the error of the Judaizing teachers and rebuked their sin. By necessity, the evangelists of the first century would have preached the fulfillment of the law of Moses and the true authority of Christ. When the apostles had a personal study with a possible convert, they would have undoubtedly corrected the tendency of the convert to return to the Old Testament law. Why can’t we see this today?

It is also evident in Acts 17:10-11 that Paul challenged the Jews in Berea to search the scriptures. He was telling them that their law had been fulfilled and that it was no longer their source of justification. This would certainly have been difficult for the people to accept. And then also, later on in Acts 17, we find Paul the apostle preaching to the people in Athens. Does He just simply preach a sugar-coated lesson on Jesus- His death, burial and resurrection? No! He shows them the error of their idolatrous ways, and as we see in verse 32, many mocked and did not believe Paul. Those today who demand that we, “Preach Christ, NOT the church,” would surely have opposed the efforts of Paul and would have rebuked him, saying, “Preach Christ, NOT the errors of idolatry.” Many would have objected, “Don’t tell them what they are doing wrong- just tell them what they need to do!”

Can you not see that we must preach Christ **AND** the church? In fact, how can we possibly separate them, as He is the Head of the body, which is the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). We can clearly see that before someone can be led into the light, they must first be led out of darkness- in the first century, that darkness could have been characterized by Judaism and idolatry; but today, that darkness is characterized by denominationalism and ecumenicalism. How can someone truly be converted, and how can they count the costs unless they first understand to some degree the commitment they are making to Christ and His body?

The gospel is not sugar-coated, nor is it easy to accept, yet many people today want to change the nature of the gospel in order to draw more people to Jesus. But a watered down gospel will be ineffective, as it does not possess the saving power of the true gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16). We must accept that the word of God will divide families (Matthew 10:34), and that it will be too hard for many to accept (John 6:66). Not only does the gospel contain exhortation and encouragement, but it also contains rebuke (2 Timothy 4:2). God is not only good, but He is severe (Romans 11:22).

Those liberally minded brethren today who oppose our preaching the New Testament pattern and the church would also have opposed Stephen and Paul in their efforts. They would have complained when the error of idolatry was taught as opposed to a sweet lesson of Jesus, and they would have moaned when Judaism was said to be a false standard of authority. Let us preach Christ **AND** His church, and let us also show the error of religious division. We **HAVE** to!